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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S AUG 28 MEETING WITH VFM YABUNAKA PART
1: FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF A DPJ GOVERNMENT

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Classified By: Ambassador John V. Roos; reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Ambassador stressed in an August 28 meeting with Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka that continuity in Japan's foreign policy and the U.S.-Japan Alliance following the August 30 Lower House elections are critical. VFM Yabunaka concurred fully on the need for continuity in Japan's policies and that the new government ought not to risk Japan's national security for political gains. In a recent meeting with Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leader Yukio Hatoyama, the VFM said he had made three recommendations: 1) to maintain continuity in Japan's foreign policy; 2) to pursue "symbolic" policy change on issues that have little effect on overall substantive policy; and 3) to refrain from speaking publicly about Alliance issues, such as revising the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement. He urged the Ambassador not to take Hatoyama's August 26 New York Times op-ed at face value, as it presents a distorted image of Hatoyama's views on foreign and security policies. He underscored that Hatoyama recognizes fully the importance of the U.S.-Japan Alliance. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On August 28, the Ambassador met with Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka. The DCM also participated in the meeting. VFM Yabunaka was accompanied by Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) North America Bureau Director General Kazuyoshi Umemoto. (Note: This cable highlights VFM Yabunaka's views on foreign policy implications of possible changes in the Japanese government following the August 30 Lower House elections. Other aspects of the meeting will be reported septel. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Yabunaka concurred fully with the Ambassador's assessment that the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)'s

election-period rhetoric ought not to be taken at face value, but that continuity in Japan's foreign policy and continued close cooperation between the United States and Japan remain critical as Japan transitions to a new government after the August 30 Lower House elections. He stated that he had recently met twice with DPJ leader Yukio Hatoyama, one session for three hours one-on-one to discuss foreign policy issues> He had made three recommendations to Hatoyama if he were to become Prime Minister. First, he urged Hatoyama to to maintain continuity in Japan's foreign policy. While it remains unclear who would become the new Foreign Minister or Defense Minister, each new minister will inevitably face immediate pressure to articulate their new policies and changes.

14. (C) Yabunaka stated that his second recommendation is that any policy change based on political needs ought to be symbolic and not have significant impact on substantive issues. He had reviewed the entire foreign policy agenda with Hatoyama and, as an example, had urged him to manage the way in which the DPJ leader intended to follow through on his campaign pledge to end the Indian Ocean refueling mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Rather than focusing simplistically on terminating the mission, the Japanese government could emphasize all the civilian contributions to Afghanistan and Pakistan, including Japan's monetary support for Afghan police. Termination of the OEF refueling mission would not take place immediately, as the current Special Measures Law authorizing the mission lapses in January. At that time, however, the Japanese government would need to have in hand a bigger package of civilian support to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Yabunaka asserted to Hatoyama.

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15. (C) Regarding his third recommendation, Yabunaka said he told Hatoyama to keep a low profile on U.S.-Japan Alliance issues, such as those relating to U.S. bases and cautioned him against using Alliance issues for political gains. He pointed out to Hatoyama that speaking openly about issues such as the Status of Forces Agreement, Host Nation Support, and Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) might be politically expedient, but doing so also risks affecting the U.S.-Japan Alliance in a negative way. He told Hatoyama that no political gain is worth risking Japan's national security. He added that Hatoyama understood his recommendations fully, pointing out that the DPJ leader has been refraining from making any public remarks on Alliance issues since their meeting.

16. (C) Yabunaka expressed shock at the tone of Hatoyama's August 26 New York Times op-ed, noting that the op-ed is a closely-cropped, English-language version of a longer essay published earlier in a monthly Japanese periodical and thus presents a distorted view on Hatoyama's overall political philosophy. The essay, he stressed, touched on issues relevant to foreign policy only in passing. The op-ed only comprises about a third of the full essay, with the remaining two-thirds of the original essay's content largely directed at the domestic Japanese audience. Yabunaka underscored that Hatoyama's writing criticizes the Koizumi-brand of globalization, not the United States, pointing out that the op-ed mentions specifically that the U.S.-Japan alliance will continue to be the cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy as Japan builds relationships with its regional neighbors. Hatoyama had intended to convey a compassionate image to voters who had been adversely affected or disillusioned by the Koizumi-era government reforms for globalization, Yabunaka said. (Note: DPJ sources informed Embassy Tokyo that the op-ed was the brainchild of Hatoyama's foreign policy advisor Jitsuro Terashima, head of the Japan Research Institute. They also informed us that the op-ed was not fully vetted within the party and that Hatoyama's staff "had no idea a NYT op-ed was such a big deal." End Note.)

ROOS